RAJYA SABHA

Thursday, the 10th March, 1988/Phalguna, 1909 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock, **Mr. Chairman** in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Demolition of Historical Buildings by the Navy

*221. SHRI DHARAM CHANDER PRASHANT:†
SHRI SURESH KALMADI:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Navy plan to demolish historical buildings of the Naval Dockyard along Shahid Bhagat Singh Road in Bombay in spite of the fact that the Chief of the Naval Staff had assured not to demolish these buildings; and

(b) if so, what are the reasons for the same?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI SANTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) and (b) Government had received representations from the various Environmental Groups in Bombay and Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage. After considering these, Govt. constituted a Working Group in September, 87 to go into the matter of the modernisation of the Naval Dockyard and the preservation of the historical buildings therein. Further action will be taken after receiving the report of the Working Group.

SHRI DHARAM CHANDER PRASHANT: Sir, this Working Group has been set up for the purpose of modernisation of the Dockyard. If the report is not favourable to this historical building, what will be the policy and the reaction of the Government?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI K. C. PANT): Sir, the Working Group is going into all the aspects of this matter. It has met the representaives of "environmentalist groups." It has been to the site. It has been the modernisation programmes, the necessity for widening the road etc. It will take all these aspects into consideration before coming to a decision.

SHRI SURESH KALMADI: Sir, these buildings that our navy had planned to demolish are memorials to the outstanding maritime history of India and the nevy in particular. The Working Group has been appointed because of representation by the environmentalist group. But, I would like to place on record that the Bombay Municipal Corporation had also objected to place these buildings in the Historical Document of Buildings. The Director of Archaeology also has declared these buildings as protected monuments. Sir, the brunt of my question is that the Chief of Naval Staff had already stated that these buildings would not be demolished This was a commitment given clearly by the Chief of Naval Staff. I do not know why, after the commitment was given, the Working Group had to go in. Also in the Working Group I do not see any representatives of the environmentalists or civic body. Nobody is taken into that. Already three members of the Working Group have opposed the demolition.

My question to the Minister is this. Three members have already opposed it. Would you react to that? Also would you not just take the ambit of the historical buildings not only near the Naval Dockyard but of all the historical buildings in Bombay? There are 41 such buildings in Bombay in the Colaba area like Afgan Church

†The question was actually asked n the floor of the House by Shri haram Chander Prashant.

and INS Ashwani. You please take into account all these things. That should also be put before the Working Group.

SHRI K. C. PANT: Sir, Bombay is an old city, and there are several buildings which may have some archaeological importance, some aesthetic importance, some historical importance. It should be our effort to try to preserve this heritage. At the same time, a growing city has growing needs, and of necessity there have to be changes, of necessity the old has to give way to the new sometimes. In the last few decades the whole silhouette of Bombay has changed. While the concern of the environmentalists is one I respect, they have not been able to stop these changes taking place because of the other pressures. So, I think, we have to take a balanced view of this. That is why I suggested may be, the best thing is to wait for the report of the Working Group.

Now, my friend says that the building is an old one. It is perhaps of 18th or 19th century according to the records, whereas the Naval Base Dockyards are of the 16th century. So, within the conflict of interests between the preservation of the dockyards and the buildings, the time element should also be taken into account.

Then the opinions of the Archaeological Survey of India and the archaeological experts of Maharashtra may not be identical So, let that also be taken into account.

As far as the commitment of the Chief of Naval Staff goes I am sure he made a commitment keeping in mind the possible historical value of the building. And today also the Navy will be free to express its opinion. So, let that also be taken into account. Maybe it is not identical.

Finally about the Working Group. It is true that environmentalists are not represented on the Working Group, but their opinions have been taken in writing and they have been called by the Working Group and they have been interviewed. The whole matter has been discussed with them. What is more is that one appreciates the motives with which they have come into the picture, but, as I said, all the compulsions should be kept in mind.

SHRI BIR BHADRA PRATAP SINGH: Will the task entrusted to the Working Group be confined to the renovation only or to modernisation or extended to any other wider form which you may resort to. This is my first inquiry.

Secondly, reports have been printed in Delhi newspapers that protected mounments are disappearing. I would like to know whether this monument is likely to meet that fate of disapperance in course of time in the name of modernisation or you will protect this place.

SHRI K. C. PANT: What this Working Group is to go into is I quote:

> "To go into the matter of modernisation of the Naval Dockyard, Bombay, and the preservation of the historical buildings therein."

That is all. I think, what the hon. Member should appreciate is that the road is required to be widened inside the Naval Dockyard for operational purposes. The building in question belongs to the Navy and they want to widen the road. The only way of widening it is to demolish this building. Now, because of the concern which we have just discussed, this has gone to the Working Group. There is on the one hand, requirement of widening that road, which is an operational necessity, there are the other concerns of preserving the monument which you have just mentioned. So, this is a question which the Working Group is going into